

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

for

FY 00 YOUNG STAND PRUNING

(OR-110-00-25)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT
GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

August 2000

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT

EA COVER SHEET

RESOURCE AREA: Grants Pass

FY & REPORT # EA Number OR-110-00-25

ACTION/TITLE: FY 00 - Young Stand Pruning

LOCATION: Grants Pass Resource Area

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GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FY 00 - Young Stand Pruning

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Chapter 1

Purpose and Need for Action and Alternatives

A. Introduction and Need for the Proposal

1. Introduction

The purpose of this environmental assessment (EA) is to assist in the decision-making process by assessing the environmental and human affects resulting from implementing the proposed project and/or alternatives. The EA will also assist in determining if an environmental impact statement (EIS) needs to be prepared or if a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is appropriate.

This EA tiers to: (1) the Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) dated June 1995 for the Medford District Resource Management Plan dated October 1994; and (2) the Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl dated February 1994; and (3) the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its Attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl dated April 13, 1994.

2. Need / Rationale for the Proposed Action

The RMP (p.183) directs the implementation of silvicultural practices that result in array of conditions, including timber production. Pruning is directed at improving wood quality and value, i.e., the production of clear wood. It increases wood quality through the production of clear wood on rotations shorter than would be required without the action (RMP, p. 185)

B. Scoping Issues Relevant to the Proposal

No significant unique planning issues have been identified.

C. Proposed Action and/or Alternatives

1. Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

In this EA document the "no-action" alternative is defined as not implementing any aspect of the proposed action alternative(s). Defined this way, the no action alternative also serves as a baseline or reference point for evaluating the environmental effects of the action alternatives. Inclusion of this alternative is done without regard to whether or not it is consistent with the Medford District RMP.

The no action alternative is not a "static" alternative. Implicit in it is a continuation of the environmental conditions and trends that currently exist or are occurring within the project area. This would include trends such as vegetation succession and consequent wildlife habitat changes, road condition / deterioration, rates of erosion, disease spread, continuation of current road densities, trends in fire hazard changes, OHV use, *etc.*

2. Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to prune selected conifers (disease-free sugar pine, Douglas-fir, or ponderosa pine) trees in previously precommercially thinned stands as shown on the attached maps (8 units, approximately 299 acres). Resultant spacing of pruned trees will be approximately 20' x 20'. Trees will be pruned to height of approximately 9 feet or 18 feet but not more than one half the total tree height, whichever is less. Live and dead branches, lateral sprouts and epicormic branches will be pruned. Pruning will be done with hand tools: pole saws, pole pruners, loppers, and pruning knives. Limbs will be pruned to within ½" of the stem but outside the branch collar. Power tools will not be used for the primary activity of pruning. No pruning will occur within the riparian reserves for any stream classes 1-4 as shown on attached unit maps.

3. Project Design Features

Project design features (PDFs) are included for the purpose of reducing anticipated adverse environmental impacts identified in the scoping process and which might stem from the implementation of the proposed action or alternatives. This section outlines these PDFs.

a. Port-Orford cedar root disease restrictions

Port-Orford cedar as well as the pathogen *Phytophthora lateralis* (PL) are present in two of the treatment units (See Table 1). Measures to prevent the spread of PL will be required as follows:

- Units infested with the pathogen *Phytophthora lateralis* (PL) will be treated last.
- Operations in POC units and PL units will be confined to dry season (approximately June 15 to October 15). Work shall not be conducted during rainy periods / events (when water forms puddles on the road).

Chapter 2

Environmental Consequences

A. Introduction

Only substantive site-specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives are discussed in this chapter. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered affects to that component and found the proposed action or alternatives would have minimal or no affects. Similarly, unless addressed specifically, the following were found not to be affected by the proposed action or alternatives: air quality; areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC); cultural or historical resources; Native American religious sites; prime or unique farmlands; Flood plains; endangered, threatened or sensitive plant, animal or fish species; water quality; wetlands/riparian zones; wild and scenic rivers; and wilderness areas. In addition, hazardous waste or materials are not directly involved in the proposed action or alternatives.

B. Site Specific and Cumulative Effects of the Alternatives

1. Silvicultural / Wood quality

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

The stand will continue on its present growth rate trajectory. Pruning would occur naturally at some point in the future as the trees grow. The wood quality grown until that time would be knotty.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

This action will result in producing wood with tight knots or clear of knots. This is essential for production of clear wood with grades above “common” under normal, evenaged rotations for Douglas-fir (RMP-pg 185).

For healthy sugar pine trees which are pruned, there is a beneficial effect to removing the lower branches since the lower branches are those which are first inoculated with the spores of white pine blister rust from *Ribes* plants. These inoculation centers later spread to infect the entire tree.

2. Wildlife

Although a range of species may utilize the areas proposed for pruning, there are none that are considered exclusively dependent on this age class. Consequently, the potential impacts are reduced. This discussion will focus on potential impacts on T&E and survey and manage species.

a. Affected Environment

The areas proposed for pruning include stands that are generally less than 30 years old. Stands less than 30 years old do not provide nesting habitat for spotted owls, marbled murrelets, or bald eagles. Bald eagles and spotted owls may occasionally use young stands for foraging. This foraging is most likely associated with edges where adjacent large trees provide perching opportunities and cover. The areas proposed for pruning are within marbled murrelet zone 2 (35-50 miles inland). However, there have been no marbled murrelet detections within this zone in the basin and the probability of

their occurrence is very low.

Del Norte salamanders may occur where there is suitable talus and adequate canopy cover (>60%). Survey and manage molluscs with potentially suitable habitat in the project area include papillose tail-dropper (*Prophysaon dubium*) and blue-gray tail-dropper (*Prophysaon coeruleum*). These molluscs may occur where there is adequate canopy cover (>60%) and hardwoods such as big leaf maple. Typically, canopy closure for the stands included in the pruning proposal is less than 60%. Based on this, the stands proposed for pruning are not considered suitable habitat for Del Norte salamanders and survey and manage molluscs.

b. Environmental Consequences

1) Alternative 1: No Action

Typically, young trees undergo a natural process of self pruning. As trees mature, they lose their lower branches through natural processes. Observations indicate that these stands have already begun this process. Over time, the lower branches will die and fall to the ground where they contribute to ground cover.

For spotted owls, foraging and nesting habitat suitability is expected to improve as these stands mature. In general, young stands do not represent preferred foraging habitat and when utilized, foraging is typically confined to the edges.

For marbled murrelets, young stands do not provide suitable nesting habitat. As these stands mature, their suitability as nesting habitat would improve.

For bald eagles, there are no known nests within ½ mile of the proposed activities. Additionally, these young stands do not provide preferred foraging habitat for bald eagles. As these stands mature, their suitability as nesting habitat would improve.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

In general, the proposal will accelerate the pruning process already underway. Over time, stands undergo a natural process of self-pruning. As trees mature, they lose their lower branches through natural processes. Observations indicate that these stands have already begun this process.

Pruning, whether mechanical or natural, may result in reduced humidity and increased temperature. However, this shift in temperature and humidity could be offset by increased shrub density resulting from the increased sunlight reaching the understory. Additionally, because not every tree is pruned, these potential impacts are reduced.

Many species of wildlife are influenced by the complexity of the vertical structure of a stand. In general, vertical complexity contributes to more diverse species composition, particularly neotropical migrants. On the other hand, very dense stands can reduce the usefulness of habitat to wildlife by eliminating or reducing valuable shrub and forb vegetation and impacting accessibility.

Basal area will not be reduced as result of this project. However, the reduction of vertical structure may temporarily impact the suitability of habitat for species that are closely tied to the lower

branches of trees. Because the pruning is scheduled for young stands (25-35 years old), the potentially affected species would not likely include those associated with mature or old growth habitat. Also, the long term ability of the stand to attain the desired vertical structure associated with mature forests would not be impacted by the pruning treatments.

For spotted owls, pruning will not have broad implications for the suitability of foraging habitat. This is based primarily on the fact that 1) young stands do not generally represent preferred foraging habitat and, 2) in young stands, foraging by spotted owls is typically confined to the edges. Additionally, as these stands mature, they will continue to develop conditions that contribute to improved foraging suitability.

For marbled murrelets, young stands do not provide suitable nesting habitat. Pruning treatments will not impact the ability of these trees to achieve suitable nesting habitat over the long term as these stands mature. Based on this, pruning treatments are not anticipated to result in impacts to the marbled murrelet. Additionally, the areas proposed for pruning are located where the probability of murrelets is very low.

For bald eagles, there are no known nests within ½ mile of the proposed activities. Additionally, these young stands do not provide preferred foraging habitat. Pruning treatments will not impact the ability of these trees to achieve suitable nesting habitat as these stands mature. Based on this, there are no anticipated impacts to the bald eagle.

3. Fisheries

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

Allowing the trees in the upland to prune naturally will have no identifiable effect on T&E listed fisheries or the aquatic systems.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Fish will not be adversely or beneficially affected because no pruning is proposed within the riparian reserves. Thus the action will have no impact on the aquatic environment. This action will not create conditions that will retard or prevent the attainment of ACS objectives.

4. Soils and Water

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

Natural pruning will occur over the long term resulting in a slow release of nutrients held in the foliage and branches.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The proposed action will not have any adverse effect on soils. It will result in somewhat accelerated rate of organic material deposition on the forest floor from that of the not action alternative. The organic matter (cut slash) being left on the forest floor will enrich the soil in the long term as decomposition process releases nutrients into the soil. There may be some short term (very

localized) beneficial effect from added protection to mineral soil provided by the slash. No cumulative effects of concern are identified. This alternative will not create conditions that will retard or prevent the attainment of ACS objectives.

5. Botany

a. Affected Environment

The proposed treatment is not considered to be ground disturbing, therefore the treatment units have not been surveyed for vascular or non-vascular special status or survey and manage plants. The pruning treatment proposed will only occur on lower branches which are not special status or survey and manage plant habitat. The main portion of canopy will be maintained and tree boles will not be disturbed.

b. Alternative 1 - No Action

Since no special status or survey and manage plant habitat exists for this treatment, the no action alternative would have no effect. The no action alternative would not create special status or survey and manage habitat.

c. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The trees being pruned are not late successional and their upper canopies will remain intact, therefore the likelihood of affecting special status or survey and manage plants is extremely low. The action will not affect any T&E plants or habitat. Because the upper canopy is being left intact and tree growth will improve from this treatment, future shading or substrate for the re-establishment of native vascular and non-vascular species could be a positive effect of this treatment.

6. Fuels and Fire

a. Alternative 1 - No Action

Fire hazard and risk of a stand replacement wildfire would continue to increase due to the present of fuel ladders closer to the ground.

b. Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

This action could have both positive and negative effects on fuel hazard. Due to the limited amount of slash which will be created and left on the ground, it could have a slight effect of increasing fire risk for a short time. For the long term, however this action will help to reduce the fuel ladder on treated trees, and reduce the risk of adverse wildfire effects (i.e. tree mortality).

Chapter 3

Agencies and Persons Consulted

A. Public Involvement

No formal public scoping or comment period is planned due to the limited scope and intensity of the project. A notice of decision will be published in the local newspaper upon completion of the Decision Record.

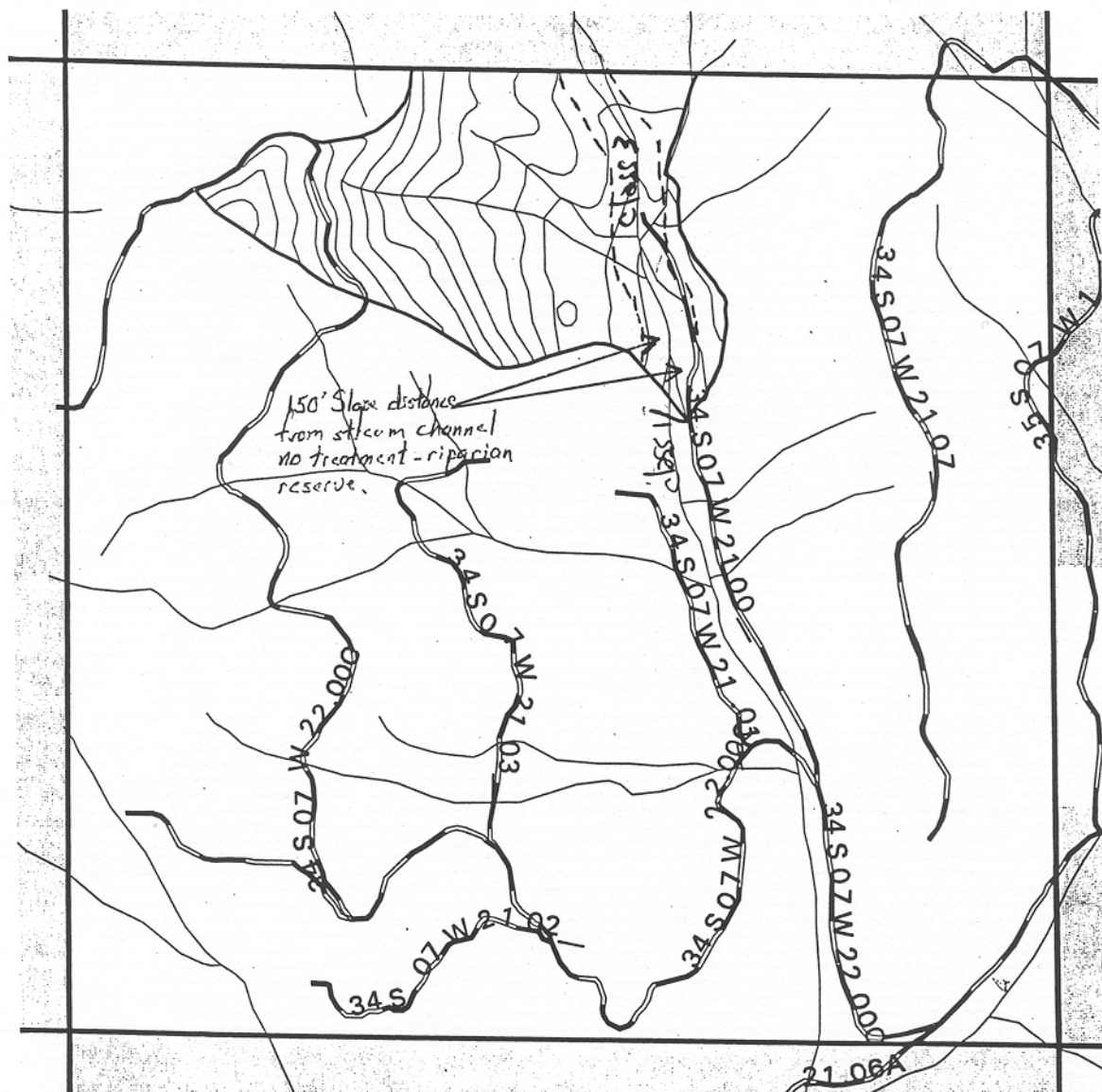
B. Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

Copies of the EA document will be available in the BLM Medford District Office and on the Medford District's web site.

TABLE 1 - FY00 - PRUNING - CE #OR110-00-25

Proposed Treatment	Key #	Legal	Land Allocation	Unit Name	Unit acres w/o Riparian Reserves	Past Harvest type & date	Stand age	Last fuel loading treatment	Within 1/4 mile of owl core	Ripar. Class (I-IV)	POC Present in area	POC Disease in area	5 th field Watershed
PRUNING	110401	34S-07W-21-002	Matrix	Stratton	56	CC - '58	40	HC brush '90 HWD girdle'90	No	III	---	---	Rogue - Recreation
PRUNING	112776	34S-07W-21-006	Matrix	Upper Stratton	52	SC - '71 SC - '78 OSR - '83	30	HC brush '90 HWD girdle'90	No	I	---	---	Rogue - Recreation
PRUNING	112786	34S-07W-23-006	Matrix	Quartz Creek 5	17	CC - '66	30	HC brush '90 HWD girdle'90	Yes	IV	---	---	Jumpoff Joe
PRUNING	110453	34S-07W-35-008	Matrix	Hog Remains	28	SC - '69 SC - '76 OSR - 84	40	HC brush '90 HWD girdle with PCT '90	Yes	---	---	---	Rogue - Recreation
PRUNING	110456	34S-07W-35-011	Matrix	Hog Remains	25	SC - '69 OSR - '84	50	HC brush '90 HC non-comm. species & PCT	Yes	IV	---	---	Rogue - Recreation
PRUNING	113186	37S-07W-19-001	Matrix	Butcherknife Creek	41	CC - '62	35	PCT - '93 HP / B - '94	No	I	---	---	Cheney/Slate
PRUNING	113369	39S-05W-17-004	AMA (Not LSR)	Williams #2	61	CC - before '62	30	No existing records. PCT - indicated by informal survey <u>only</u> . est. RT date - mid. to late 70's	No	III & IV	yes	yes	Williams

Proposed Treatment	Key #	Legal	Land Allocation	Unit Name	Unit acres w/o Riparian Reserves	Past Harvest type & date	Stand age	Last fuel loading treatment	Within 1/4 mile of owl core	Riparian Class: (I-IV)
PRUNING	115157	39S-05W-17-018	AMA (Not LSR)	Williams#1	19	CC-before 62	30	No existing records. PCT - indicated by informal survey <u>only</u> . est. RT date - mid. to late 70's	No	III & I
				Total Acres	299					



LEGEND



NON BLM LANDS

TREATMENT AREA WITH
40' CONTOUR INTERVAL

— STREAMS

— SECTION LINE

— ROADS

UNIT NAME	STRATTON
BID ITEM	
ACRES	69-13Ac. RR = 56 Acres
KEY #	110401
OI #	21-2

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PRUNING2000

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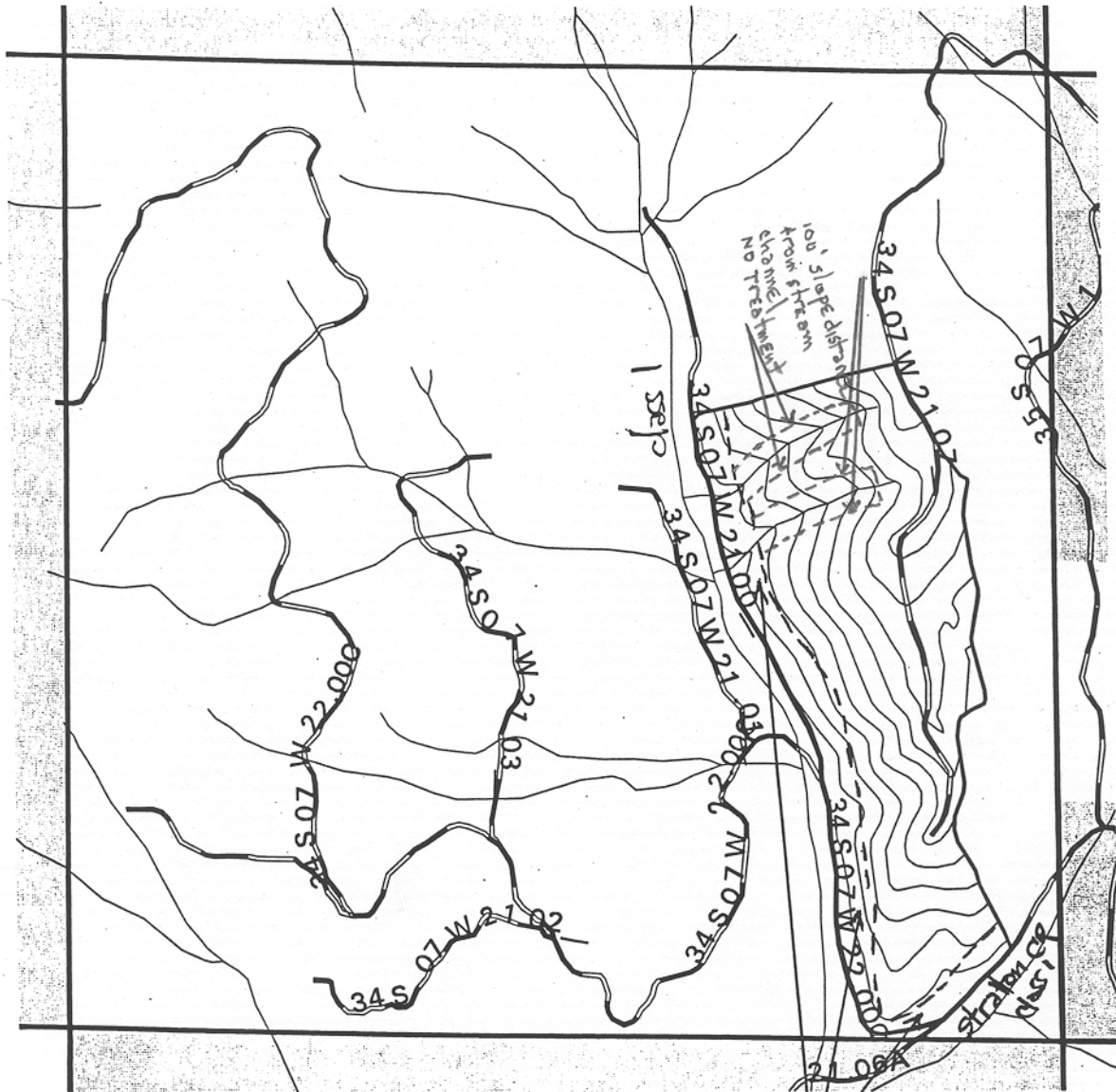
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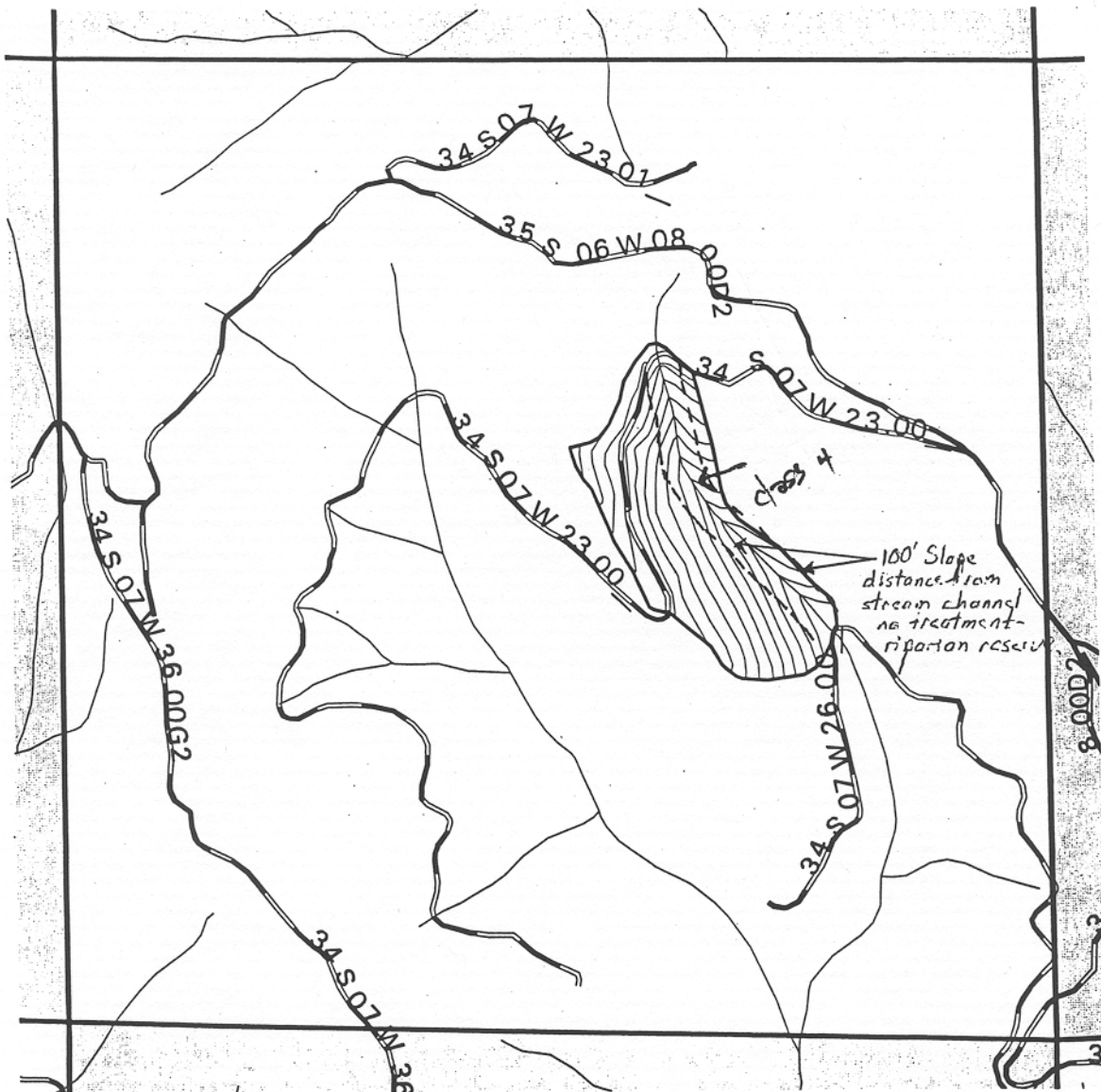
-  NON BLM LANDS
-  TREATMENT AREA WITH 40' CONTOUR INTERVAL
-  STREAMS
-  SECTION LINE
-  ROADS

300' Slope distance from stream channel no treatment-riparian reserve.






UNIT NAME	Upper Stratton
BID ITEM	
ACRES	73 - 21 Acres (RR) = 52 Acres.
KEY #	112776
OI #	21-6

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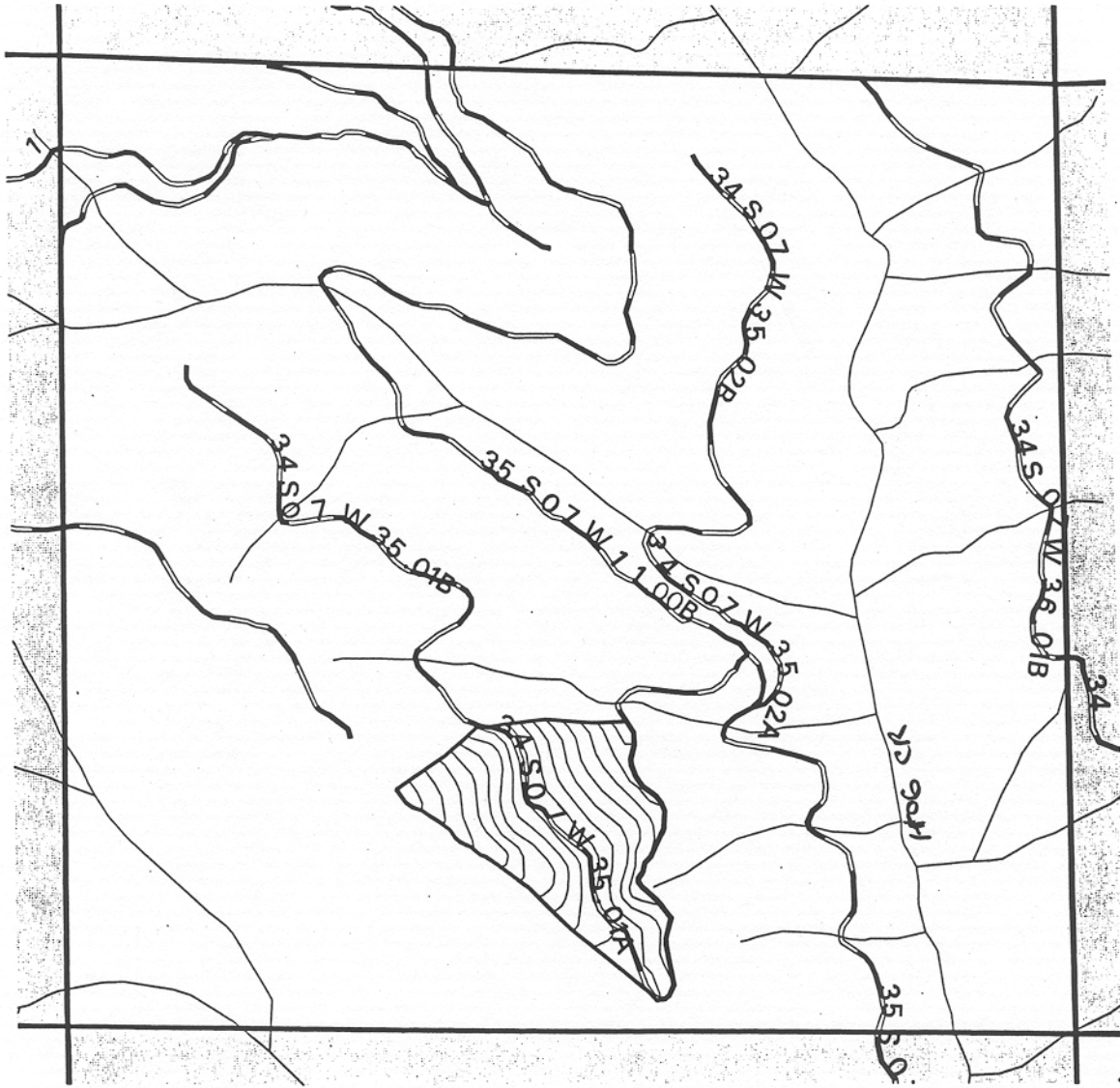
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|  TREATMENT AREA WITH 40' CONTOUR INTERVAL |  SECTION LINE |
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


UNIT NAME	Quartz Creek #5
BID ITEM	
ACRES	28-11 Ac. RR = 17 Acres
KEY #	112786
OI #	23-6

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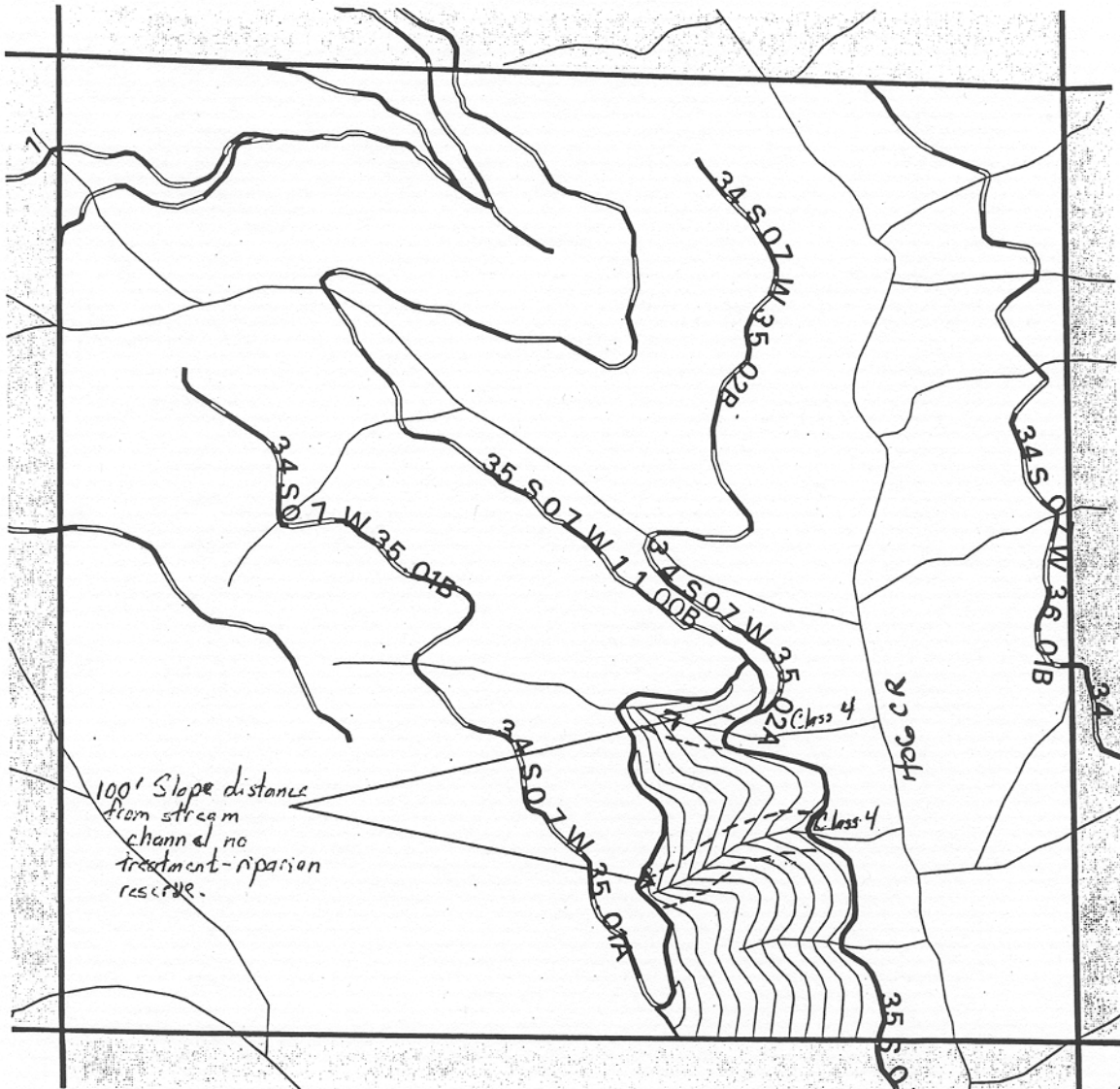
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-  TREATMENT AREA WITH 40' CONTOUR INTERVAL
-  STREAMS
-  SECTION LINE
-  ROADS






UNIT NAME	HOG REMAINS
BID ITEM	
ACRES	28
KEY #	110453
OI #	35-8

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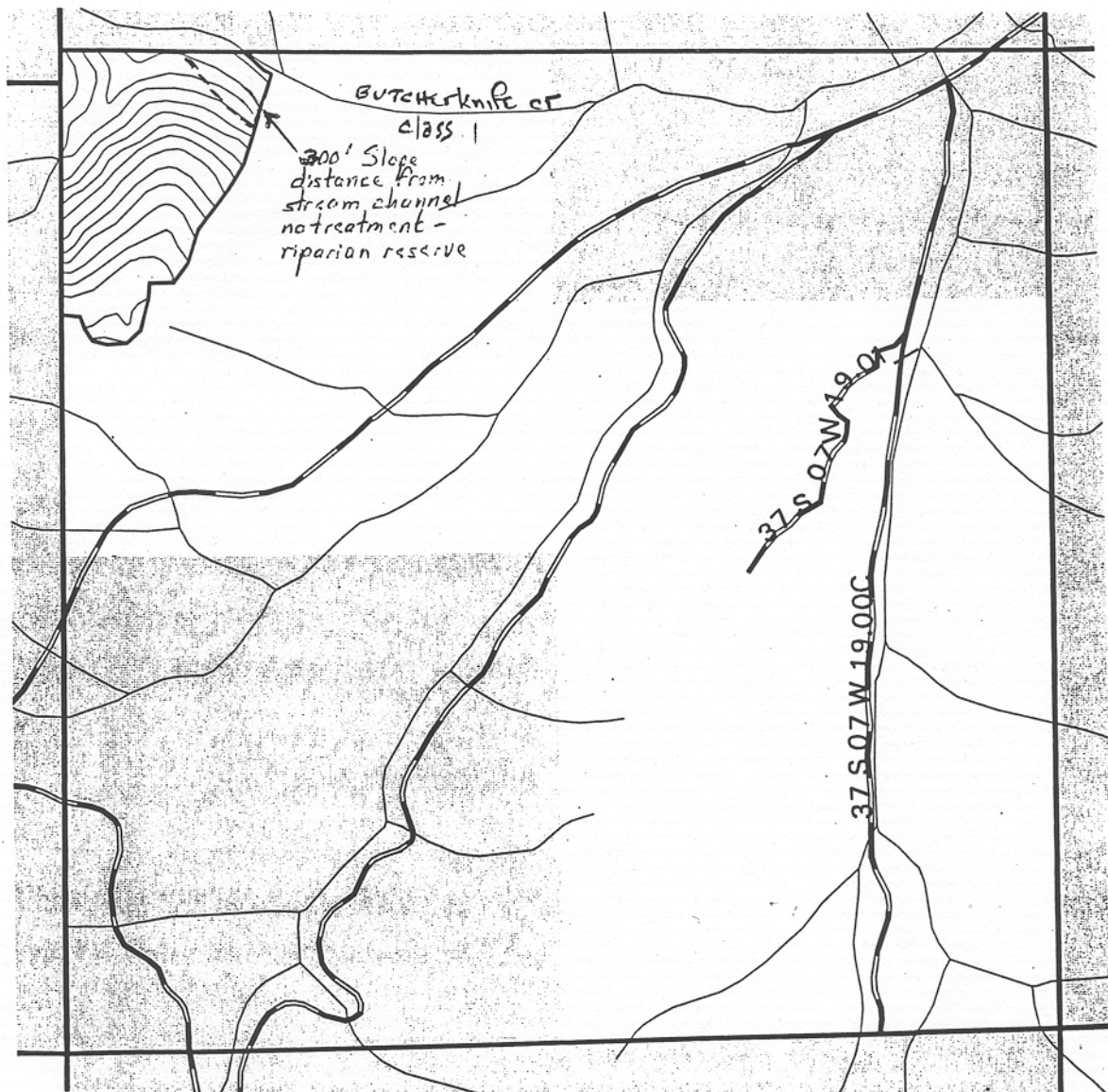
UNIT NAME	HO G REMAINS
BID ITEM	
ACRES	34 - 9 Acres RR = 25 Acres
KEY #	110456
OI #	35-11

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|  NON BLM LANDS |  STREAMS |
|  TREATMENT AREA WITH 40' CONTOUR INTERVAL |  SECTION LINE |
| |  ROADS |

UNIT NAME	BUTCHERKNIFE CR
BID ITEM	
ACRES	44 - 3 Acres RR = 41 Acres
KEY #	113186
OI #	19-1

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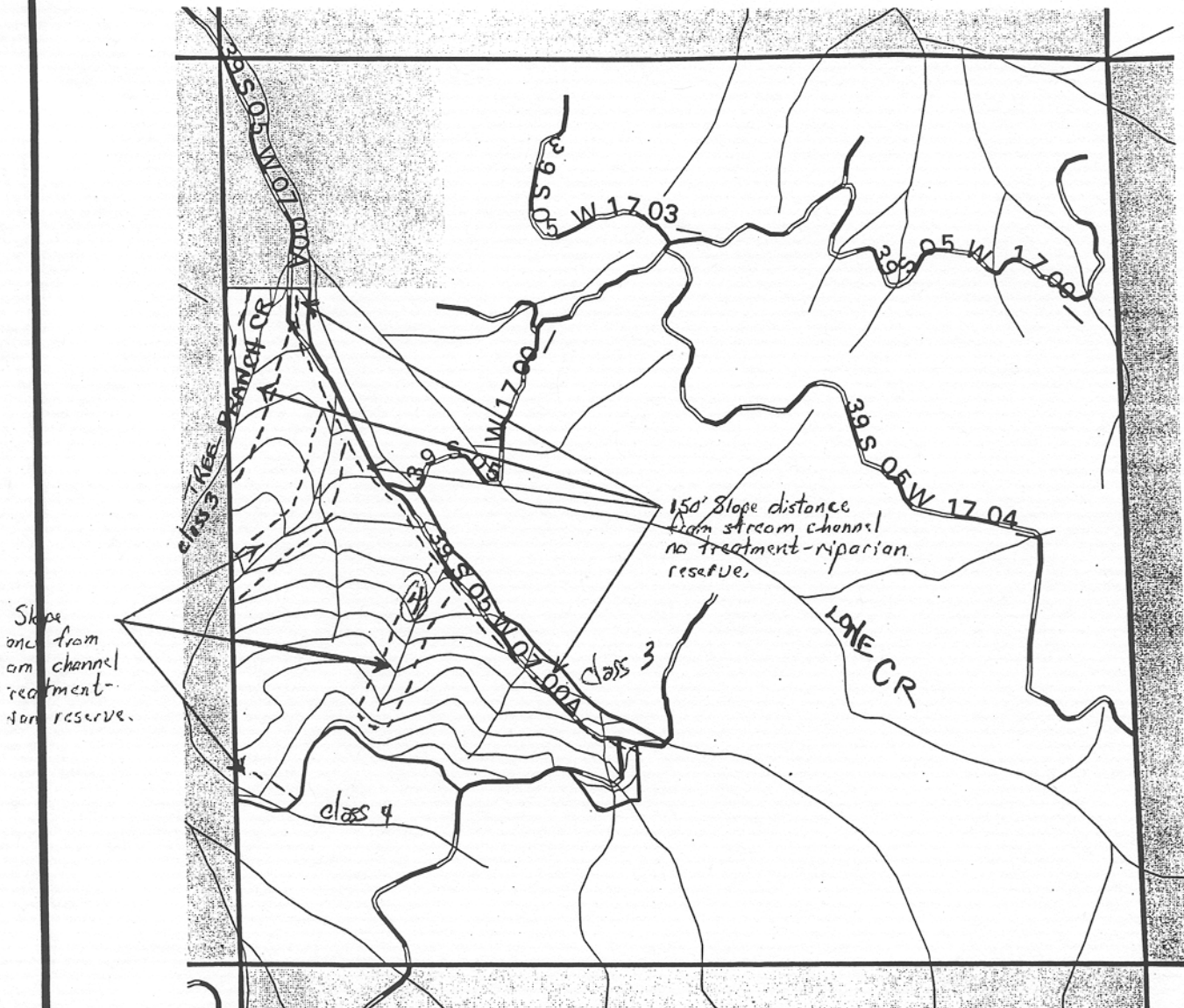
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- TREATMENT AREA WITH 40' CONTOUR INTERVAL
- STREAMS
- SECTION LINE
- ROADS

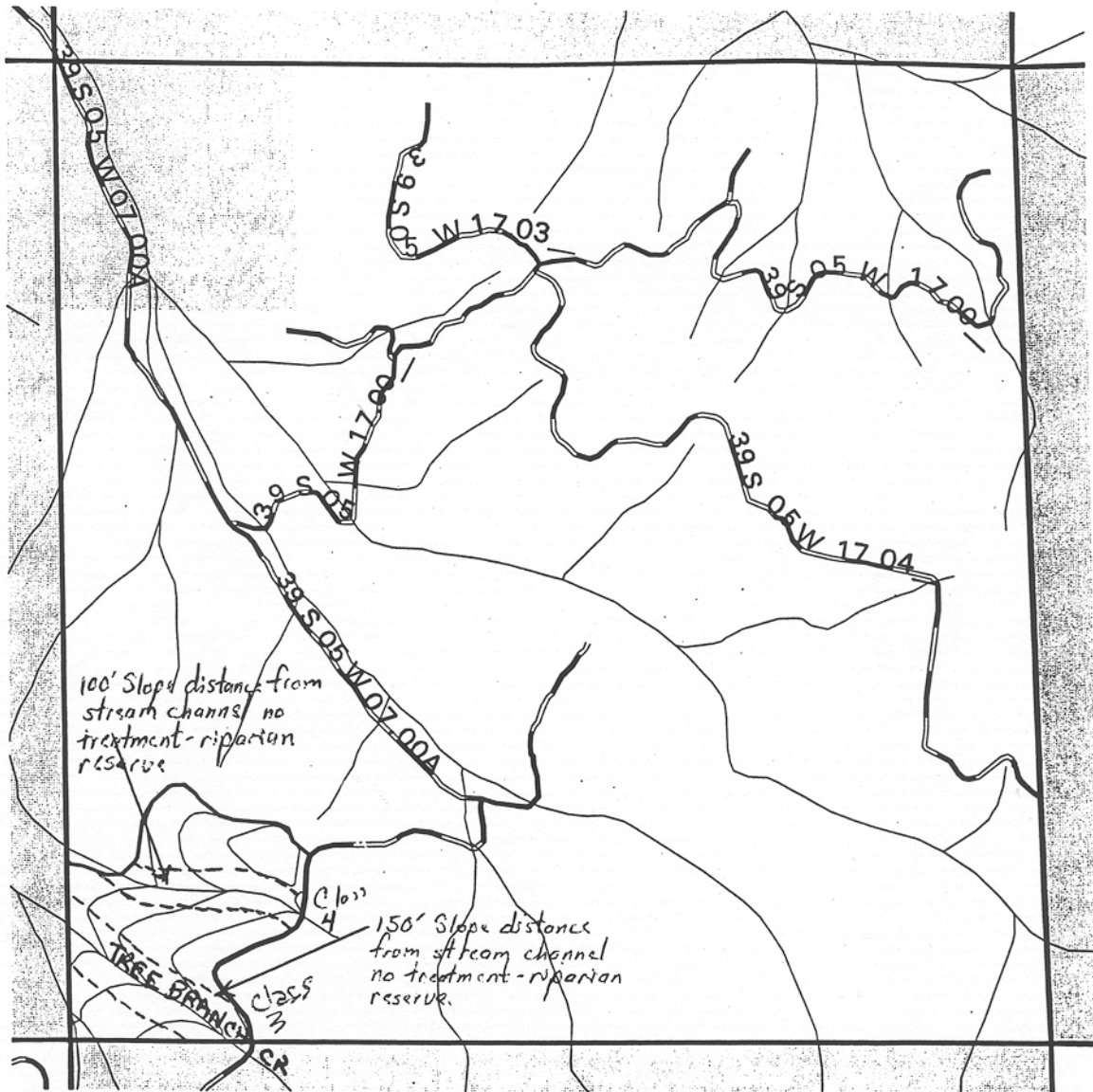
UNIT NAME	Williams #2
BID ITEM	
ACRES	93 - 32A. RR = 61 Acres
KEY #	113369
OI #	17-4

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- ☐ NON BLM LANDS
☒ TREATMENT AREA WITH 40' CONTOUR INTERVAL
 — STREAMS
 — SECTION LINE
 — ROADS

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UNIT NAME	Williams #1
BID ITEM	
ACRES	34 - 15 Ac. RR = 19 Acres
KEY #	115157
OI #	17-18

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